

Tibetan Oral History Project Interview H.0216.02

The subject is a Gelugpa incarnate lama from Drepung monastery who later lived in India and was well known to be knowledgeable about Tibetan political affairs. He discusses the favorites of the 13th Dalai Lama in detail, especially Kujar Kunphel, and about the Langdün and Pandatsang incidents. He also discussed a dispute between the Gelugpa and the Sakya sects at the time of renovating the Samye Monastery, as well as about the Tibetan national flag.

Q

The 13th Dalai Lama had so many favorites (Jensal [tib. spyan bsal]). What actually were they?

A

They were the ones the Dalai Lama had liked and had affection for.

Q

Any similarities what was found in the monasteries?

A

They were like friends. Since they are not selected from among the government officials but chosen arbitrarily, they are called Jensal. Among the Jensal, Jensal Gyatruk [tib. rgya phrug lags] was offered by the Chinese. His real name was Senjor [ch. sen jiao]. Actually, the Chinese offered two Jensal at that time. One of them turned out to be an informer for the Chinese at the time when the 13th Dalai Lama went to India. The other Jensal, Senjor, was very honest and sincere. The 13th Dalai Lama himself taught him poetry and grammar, etc. Later on, he also carved a throne for the Buddha statue called Tsütrima [tib. tshul khirms ma] in Drepung. Much later he even wrote a book that implied that the geshe didn't recognize the incarnation. His real name was Senjor but he was popularly known as gyatruk (literally: Chinese kid). The other Jensal were Namdröl [tib. nnam grol] and Dechen Yingsal [tib. bde chen dbyings gsal]. They were the later (newer) Jensal.

Q

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Where do the older Jensal go?

A

They live separately and do their prayers and other religious practices. They still remain as Jensal but they do not have to go to the Dalai Lama daily. Künphel was always with the Dalai Lama. Jensal Etruk [tib. e phrug] and Dechen Yingsal came after Künphel.

Q

Dechen Yingsal was exiled to the Lhoka area.

A

There are also instances of Jensal being chosen from among the stable boys of the Dalai Lama [tib. chibs g.yog].

Q

What is the criterion to become a Jensal?

A

It depends on whether the Dalai Lama keeps him or not.

Q

How would the Dalai Lama keep him?

A

He keeps the person among his Jensal. Jensal Künphel was, in the beginning, a wooden block carver, [tib. par brkos pa]. The Dalai Lama was impressed by his work and he kept him as his Jensal. Later, in the tsondu there were strong oppositions to the institution of Jensal. This opposition came up in the tsondu after the demise of the Dalai Lama. It was said in the tsondu that there should not be a separate office of Jensal besides the government officials. Among the Jensal, Künphel was the most powerful. Even the shape nearly had to bow before him.

Q

Künphel was said to even attend the Kashag and would discuss important matters and give his opinions on them. Later, after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, when Künphel

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was called to the tsondu, a lot of troubles came up. There was also some talk regarding guns. Did you hear that?

A

Yes. Lhopa Khenpo too nearly got involved in the trouble. Lhopa Khenpo said that we should not treat Künphel badly because the Dalai Lama liked him and this kind of supported the group in the tsondu that supported Künphel. However, Lhopa Khenpo might have made this suggestion purely out of his religious feelings as he also quoted some related texts. Lhopa Khenpo was supported by the Ngagpa ex-Khenpo nicknamed "Nepalese", Belpo [tib. bal po]. I definitely heard that both of them nearly suffered misfortune [tib. dbu nyes] because of this.

Q

Was that the meeting to discuss whether or not Künphel should be punished?

A

Some people even said that Künphel had offered them [Lhopa Khenpo and Ngagpa Khenpo] a package of gold and a monk's vest made from brocade (Töngag [tib. stod 'gag]).

Q

Usually monks are fond of all sorts of gossip.

A

At that time, my tutor told me that by treating Künphel in such a manner and by also demoting the silön, Yabshi Langdün, nothing good would come out of this for the country. We were at the Tshongjö' Prayer Festival on the day when Langdün was demoted. On this day some strange natural omens occurred. The sky was overcast by a dusty cloud and there was a wailing wind which brought down dust like drizzle. The sun had a reddish color without any glow and warmth. At the same time, people in the Lhasa street's sang all sorts of songs. One of the songs said, "Even though the mule is annoyed, let him be. Mount the brown horse and be prepared to leave." [tib. drel tho log tsigpa za na'i za. rta ragpa bzhon nas 'gro rtsis byed]. The meaning of the first line of the song, "If the mule..." refers to Langdün who was demoted and at that time had a mule. So the song says let him be annoyed or feel humiliated. The second line of the song, "Ride the brown horse and leave." refers to Reting who had a very good brown horse. At that time, people understood

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this as Langdün being humiliated, but my teacher told me that talking about the brown horse was not a good sign for Reting Rinpoche and Reting did have misfortune. If he had heeded the warning of the song and had gone to India on a pilgrimage as was suggested by many of his people, he would have got through. Tsörujenpa [tib. gtsod ru can pa], the Deity of Ganden Chönkhor [tib. dga' ldan chos 'khor] Monastery gave symbolic predictions twice. In the first instance, when Reting was yet to become the Regent, the deity revealed a goat [symbolizes Reting] adorned with the ornaments of gems. After Reting's accession to the Regency, the deity revealed a goat with a wheel of weapons [tib. mtshon cha 'khor lo] on its back.

Q

As you know, after the demise of the 13th Dalai Lama, Huang Musong of the Guomindang, and Richardson and Rai Bahadur of British India came to Lhasa to offer condolence offerings. Could you tell me more about this?

A

Yes. I remember Huang Musong. He came at first to offer condolences but then continued to stay as the Chinese (government's) representative.

Q

What did he do at Drepung Monastery?

A

He came to Drepung and gave alms to the monks.

Q

Did the Chinese representative offer a new "pan" at the main gate of the assembly hall?' [NOTE: 'Pan,' is a kind of board hung on the top of a gate bearing words in Chinese characters traditionally gifted by the Chinese rulers to monasteries.]

A

I don't think they offered a new pan. They might have offered one to the new Gold Stupa. Drepung had one already, so I don't think they offered a new one.

Q

What was written on that pan?

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A

I asked the two Chinese monks, Champa Künkhyen [tib. byams pa kun mkhyen] and Rinchen Dorje [tib. rin chen rdo rje] and they told me that What was written on that pan was not very favorable for the Tibetans. They said that although it mentions high exalted positions to the holder, yet ultimately it mentions Tibet as a part of China. Of these two Chinese monks, Champa Künkhyen was more learned and later I heard that he was working in the Newspaper Office. The other Chinese monk, Rinchen Dorje, confided in me that before coming to Lhasa he was an army officer of the not very high rank of Lian zhang. He told me frankly that these pan mention Tibet as a part of China.

Q

There was one called Chöndze Lobsang Dönyö [tib. blo bzang don yod], right?

A

Yes, in the beginning. Later he was nothing and worked for the Chinese.

Q

No one had any idea about the meaning of those inscriptions on the pan. I heard that even today these pans are still hanging in their places.

A

The real objective of the Chinese to offer these pan was to symbolize their jurisdiction over Tibet.

Q

What did the Tibetans believe these to be?

A

Tibetans said that they contained auspicious words that were compliments, like the Chinese word "bao" which means precious stone and the word "shou" which means long life. There was one at the Tsuglagang, and another at Tse in front of the Avaloketisvara's image with a red silk knot called Ling. They had specially placed them at important places.

Q

Then after this, the Panda trouble came up, right?

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A

It was widely said that Panda Rabga [tib. spom mda' rab dga'] and Topgye [tib. stobs rgyal] were coming to Lhasa from Kham with soldiers and was going to make war. In Lhasa, the Panda House was surrounded by the army.

Q

At that time, I heard the Drepung's Loseling College did not offer a surety for Panda. What was the reason for that?

A

They did offer a surety in the end. Probably the Drepung Laji gave the surety.

Q

No. Loseling did not come to give a surety. I heard that Phabongkha [tib. pha bong kha] had gone to the Kashag too.

A

I have never heard that.

Q

At that time, the main persons who negotiated with the government about Panda were Phabongkha's Chandzö, Gendag Urgyan [tib. rgan bdag o rgyan] and few others. Sera Me college [tib. smad] gave a surety but Loseling did not.

A

Maybe Lhopa Khenpo told them not to do that. Although Panda [House] was surrounded by the army from the outside, the matter was settled through talks by Panda's men and his supporters. Most prominent among them was a grey haired monk called something Gelong [tib. dge slong]. He was a very capable person.

Q

Trimön was at that time the most powerful person in the Kashag. It was said that they [Panda] paid a huge amount to Trimön, which is reflected in the following song, "The golden family of Pandatsang, shot a golden arrow which landed on the roof of Trimön with

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the sound "jag". [tib. gser khyim spom mda' tshang nas/ gser gyi mda' mo btang song/ sa dbang khri smon thog khar/ 'jag sgra brgyab nas bab song]

A

Such songs are very common in Lhasa. The legend of these songs is believed to have originated from the water carriers of the Mönlam Prayer Festival. It is believed that they are manifestations of the deity Palden Lhamo [tib. dpal ldan ldan mo] [Shri Devi]. This seems to hold some truth because such songs were also sung before and after Reting's trouble. The song that was sung after the Reting's trouble was: "The compassionate billy-goat, offered something to the Tiger. The merciless Tiger, devoured the billy-goat in one swallow." [tib. ra pho snying rje can gyis/ stag la cig cig sprad song/ stag mo snying rje med pas/ ra pho khyur mid btang song] Similar satiric songs were sung about the promotion, demotion and appointment of the kudrak.

Q

What renovation work was done by Reting Rinpoche on Samye Monastery?

A

At that time, Liushar [tib. sne'u shar] and Shasur [tib. bshad zur] were entrusted with the supervision of the renovation work. At the suggestion of Liushar and Shasur, Kyabje Khangsar [tib. skyabs rje khang gsar] Rinpoche was invited to Rabchung College [tib. rab byung grwa tshang] [at Samye] as its head Lama. One of the incarnate lamas of Rabchung College and another one did not like this. According to them they [Liushar etc] had requested Kyabje Rinpoche to convert Rabchung College, which belonged to the Sakya sect into the Gelugpa sect. Kyabje Khangsar Rinpoche declined to do this. [What happened was that] in response to the request for a good abbot to be sent to Rabchung College, one was sent who was well accomplished in the theoretical aspects of Tantra but was not initiated in the practice of sutra. Liushar and Shasur, who were both well informed about religion, found much lacking in the abbot and sent a petition to the government for a better abbot. However, the new Abbot sent from Sakya proved to be just the opposite of his predecessor. He was well versed in sutra dialectics but was devoid of any knowledge of tantra. Naturally, Liushar and Shasur were not satisfied with this abbot and sent a very strong report saying that the former one was only practicing tantra and the latter one was only practicing sutra so finally one of the dungsey [tib. gdung sras] [sons] of either Droma Phodrang or Phüntsho Phodrang was sent. During his stay, Kyabje Khangsar Rinpoche was invited by someone to give a religious initiation and while Rinpoche was preaching,

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the Sakya dungsey happened to be listening from a secret place. After the conclusion of Kyabje Rinpoche's teaching, the Sakya dungsey called everyone and told them "Kyabje Rinpoche is a great teacher who can teach and direct you the very foundation of religion and that I do not measure up to Rinpoche's standard." He further told them, "I have come only because of the order of the government, but I don't have any detailed teaching to give on the five dialectics volumes [tib. gzhung chen bka' pod lnga] so I am going to return back to Sakya." And he returned to Sakya. Later I heard both Liushar and Shasur nearly received whippings.

Q

What was the reason for this?

A

The main reason was not accepting Kyabje Khangsar Rinpoche as the head of Rabchung College and also for speaking against him. They were nearly given whippings, but Kyabje Rinpoche didn't let them whip them but a lot of trouble ensued owing to this. Kyabje Rinpoche died soon thereafter and it was believed that he was killed through black-magic [tib. byad gtad]. At that time, there was talk about a large congregation of Tantric practitioners in Amdo gathering there to cast black-magic on all the well-known lamas of Gelugpa sect, including, the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. It was said that over a thousand Tantric practitioners had assembled at that time. Later, it was said that the teacher of those Tantric Practitioners was afflicted by a very dreadful disease. The flesh of his body cracked into pieces.

Still the teacher was undaunted. He called all of his students to his house and as his last death wish, he told his students, "We are all equally committed to this Tantric curse [tib. mnan pa]. I am about to die but you students should not discontinue the yearly ritual practices." At this, one of the students stood up, prostrated three times before his teacher and pleaded, "O Guru, do not commit us to do such practice any more. You see with your own naked eyes the consequences of such a practice." The teacher was annoyed by this and told the student that he had violated his obligation and hence from that day on, he is expelled from the community of his students. This particular student later went to Central Tibet.

Some people even maintain that the 13th Dalai Lama's death too was caused by the curse [tib. gnod pa]. When Phabongkha Rinpoche returned to Lhasa, he told my teacher, "Look, I have returned safely now. If something had happened to me on the way, they would have said that it was due to their curse. Even nowadays, there is lot of talk about

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this. Sometimes, I feel like the curse was real because I also have said something and the talk would spread right away and I also had the name [of the lama]. So I have a strange uncomfortable feeling. In general, I would always act unbiased, but when it comes to a critical point, I would have a slip of the tongue and say something like, "One should keep on one's tradition. [tib. rang lugs gtad so yod pa] and perceive [the other sects] as good because it was said that all sentient beings should be seen as Buddhas [tib. sems can tshang mar ston pa'i dag snang sbyang dgos], but this doesn't mean that we should mix everything [traditions].

Q

It is said that Reting Rinpoche carried out tremendous renovation work on the Samye monastery, right?

A

Yes. He did. Dongthog Rinpoche was of the opinion that the original Tibetan flag was newly made somewhere in Samye by the two of them [Liushar and Shasur]. After the completion of the renovation work, Liushar and Shasur had designed a new one based on the old one which was taken from a hidden treasure [tib. gter]. He said that the original one did not have the yellow border [tib. 'ja' ser po] and that they consulted Phabongkha Rinpoche and he designed the yellow border. Shakabpa has a different view on this subject. According to him, the Tibetan national flag was designed by the 13th Dalai Lama. He even claims that the original prints of the design were in the Kashag office.

Q

Dongthog says that Phabongkha had influence in the making of the design and the original one was at Samye.

A

Dongthog says that the yellow border was not in the original one.

Q

I don't think that the original flag at Samye was the Tibetan flag.

A

Shakabpa says that the flag with the emblem of human skulls was originally used as a war flag. But he did not talk about the other designs of this flag.

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Q

There was no tradition of a national flag in Tibet. It must have been a flag attached to the spear of a protector deity [tib. chos skyong gi rten mdung].

A

Yes, that is true. But the present national flag was, I was told, designed by the 13th Dalai Lama himself and there were symbols like the sword and the vajra. It seems he made based on his observations in foreign countries.

Q

It has some resemblance to the British flag.

A

But many do not agree with this hypothesis.

Q

Is it because of the "yellow color?" [NOTE: Yellow is the symbol of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. This sect is also known as the 'Yellow hat' sect because of the yellow hat worn by its founder, Je Tsongkhapa [tib. rje tson kha pa]. So the yellow colour on the flag is also interpreted as representing the Gelug sect.]

A

The government later changed the original definition of the yellow border of the flag saying it was the "the radiance of Buddha's doctrine" instead of the original definition, "the radiance of the Ganden sect." But actually there was no need to change it.

Q

But, still if you change it to "the radiance of Buddha's doctrine," then you exclude the Bonpo and Christian communities. The government must have felt some pressure to make these changes.

A

The Great 5th Dalai Lama was a Gelugpa Lama.

Q

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One can not say for certain whether he was a Gelugpa Lama or a Nyingmapa Lama.

A

But he was a Lama of Drepung Monastery.

Q

I think you cannot say that a Drepung Lama is a Gelugpa Lama as well.

A

The Great 5th Dalai Lama had said that I did this thing [religious practices] but was not included in the Nyingmapa sect and I did that thing but was not included in the Kagyüpa sect. The 13th Dalai Lama showed great inclination towards the Nyingma sect's doctrine. The Nyingmapa at that time said that the 13th Dalai Lama too might be like the Great 5th, because the 5th Dalai Lama showed great liking towards the Nyingmapa but in reality he was a staunch Gelugpa at heart.

Q

Could you tell me more about the Panda trouble?

A

I heard about it when I was in the monastery. In the beginning it was said that the Pandatsang House was going to be sealed by the government. Much commotion and confusion seemed to have followed, but due to the tactful intervention of the mediators for Pandatsang, the issue was resolved within a short span of time. Most notable among those who mediated on behalf of Pandatsang with the government, was one called Changeling Jola [tib. byang gling jo lags], who approached the kudrak and other concerned influential officers. So ultimately, we heard that the Pandatsang house was not sealed and that the issue was resolved very leniently.

Q

Did Reting Rinpoche make a public announcement of what he had seen in the Sacred Lake regarding the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama?

A

I haven't heard anything different than what is mentioned in the 14th Dalai Lama's autobiography. In it is mentioned that Reting Rinpoche saw three letters, A, KA, MA in

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the lake. And the letter A means Amdo and KA means the monastery of Karmapa Rölpai Dorje [tib. kar ma pa rol pa'i rdo rje] It seems these revelations appeared in the lake like the pictures on the cinema screen.

Q

Didn't the letter MA means the prayer Migtsema [tib. dmigs brtse ma] and mean Kumbum?

A

Yes, I heard that the birth place was shown very clearly.

Q

Have you ever seen a vision in the lake?

A

No.

Q

Probably, it was shown like in the cinema and the Tra divination might be also similar. Once Kyabje Lhabtsün [tib. lha btsun] Rinpoche went to watch the lake for a vision on politics and when I asked him how was the vision, he told me, "I just saw some Khampas going back and forth carrying a something made from gold." When he came back, he heard that the Khampas were offering a golden throne to the Dalai Lama.

Q

Reting Rinpoche renovated Samye on a large scale. Not only Samye, he is said to have done other renovation work in Lhoka as well.

A

He renovated Nyethang Drölma Lhakhang [tib. mnyes thang sgrol la lha khang] also.

Q

Sometime after this, Trimön resigned. What was the reason for his resignation? Trimön had become a bit mentally unbalanced. Was it before or after his resignation?

A

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According to some people, a certain Lama told Trimön that he is the reincarnation of a Tertön [tib. gter ston] [hidden treasure revealer]. [NOTE: Tertön is mostly a Nyingmapa sect Lama prophecied by Guru Padmasambva to reveal his hidden treasures.]

Q

The name of the Lama who told him that he is the reincarnation of a Tertön was Dechen Chönkhor Yongdzin [tib. bde chen chos 'khor yongs 'dzin] Rinpoche. Later, he was kind of carried away [with this], right?

A

Oh! Yes. Since then it seemed he was a bit carried away by the thought that he is the reincarnation of a Tertön, and sometimes he went around Barkor wearing a white shamthab. People started saying that Trimön has become insane. But Shakabpa told me that he never lost his sanity or become deranged.

Q

According to Shakabpa, Tertön Sögyal [tib. bsod rgyal] of Kham in his letter to Trimön had said that he is the reincarnation of one of the builders of Samye monastery and when Trimön came to Samye he told him that he built the stupa in Samye.

A

Shakabpa denies that Trimön became insane. He attributes Trimön's unusual behavior to his being the reincarnation of a Tertön. But what everybody talked about and saw was a mentally unsound Trimön.

Q

Then the search for the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama was begun?

A

Wasn't Trimön's insanity after the "search" for the reincarnation?

Q

No, during the "search for reincarnation," Bönshö was the senior shape and Trimön had already resigned by that time. At the same time, the Panchen Rinpoche was in China and there was lot of talk about his coming back to Tibet. Could you tell me what you know about it?

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A

At that time, Ngagchen Rinpoche [tib. sngags chen] and the trunyichemmo of Tashilunpo Monastery came to Lhasa to talk with the government regarding the Panchen Rinpoche's return to Tibet.

Q

This trunyichemmo was nicknamed as Ashang Nagbum [tib. a zhang brnag bum] ("Uncle Malicious").

A

Among them there was also Tsagserkhang [tib. rtsag ser khang] and Ngagchen Rinpoche, who was a simple and honest monk who was reported to have agreed with most of the conditions placed by the government. But the other officials of the Panchen Rinpoche did not like this and they suspected him of siding with the government. Later, Ngagchen Rinpoche was excluded from their official circle.

Q

What did the Government say and what did the Panchen Lama's side want?

A

They had to find a common ground to decide a settlement.

Q

But what differences did the government and the Panchen Lama have between them? Were there any?

A

There weren't any differences between the governments.

Q

Wasn't there talks about the Chinese bodyguards who had come with Panchen Lama? According to the government's version there were about 500 Chinese bodyguards with Panchen Lama. Some people said they were his bodyguards, while others said they were his disciples.

A

I think there were quite a large number of them. In the end, when the Panchen Lama's belongings were brought back to Tibet and searched by the government, lot of military things and uniforms and weapons were said to have been found among the belongings. Out of these belongings, the government confiscated the army-boots, army uniforms and pistols which had a silver letter label [tib. dngul yig can po] on them. These pistols were later auctioned to the public in the Lhasa market.

Q

What was the gossip about them in the monastery?

A

It was said that the flight of Panchen Lama to China and his subsequent relations with the Tibetan Government were all created by the officials of the both sides. One example is Drönyerchemmo Apso. He was sent to a little known place as a dzongpön. This was the beginning of his career. Incidentally, there was a 'hot-spring' in this place and the Panchen Lama used to visit it. One day, Drönyerchenmo Apso received an arrow letter, 'Dayig' [tib. mda' yig] informing him of the Panchen Lama's planned visit to this place with orders to make proper arrangements during his stay. Unfortunately, this dzong was very poor. Still he offered what facilities and services the area could afford. But Tashilunpo's officials were not satisfied with his arrangements and ordered their men to arrest him. Apso too was not to be taken in easily. He escaped their arrest and went to the mountains. So the Tashilunpho people sent a complaint petition to the 13th Dalai Lama saying that the dzongpön (Apso) did not offer proper arrangements and service during Panchen Lama's visit. Responding to this petition, the 13th sent a summon order to Apso, telling him to come to Lhasa. However, instead of coming to Lhasa, he sent a detail letter explaining his case and the difficulties of his coming to Lhasa.

The 13th Dalai Lama then sent another summoning order that said that he should report to Lhasa immediately. Apso had only two satin garments, a worn out garment for the normal wear and a better satin garment for dressed up occasions. At this stage, Apso wrote a long petition seeking to resign from his post of dzong and further he returned his satin garment [tib. gos stod] along with the letter.

The 13th Dalai Lama was very pleased by Apso's behavior and when his tenure of office expired, he was called to Lhasa and was given a promotion. So this is the cause of the rift between Tashilunpo and Drönyerchemmo Apso. Gradually, Apso rose to the post of a

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drönyerchemmo and wielded sufficient power to act harshly towards Tashilunpo. And he did that. The second cause of the Panchen's 'trouble' was the 'Babshi' [tib. 'bab gzhib], tax levied on newly opened fields that was introduced by Lungshar. When Lungshar and Khenjung Lobsang Tashi [tib. blo bzang bkra shis], who were charged with collecting the tax, went to Tashilunpo to collect the Babshi tax, the Tashilunpo officers refused to pay the tax on the pretext that they have land tenure documents, Katen [tib. bka' gtan] (Katen is a sort of decree letter issued by the King or the government granting the recipient exemption from tax and corvée labor, etc.) But when Lungshar and his colleague asked them repeatedly to show the 'Katen,' they refused to show it giving some excuses saying that it is prohibited from being taking out [tib. them spang ma]. Consequently, Lungshar said if this is so, we will come to your place to check. Even then they didn't show it, saying that it is under the feet of the meditation deity [tib. yi dam]. I heard that the kudrak of Tashilunpo were treated harshly. Naturally, drönyerchemmo Apso backed Lungshar who was agitated and together they carried out the collection measures strictly without exceptions.

Q

I heard that under the 'Babshi' tax, Tashilunpo was asked to pay 1/4th of the Government's Army salary [tib. dmag phogs bzhi zur].

A

Yes. The tax imposed on Tashilunpo under 'Babshi' was so heavy that the Panchen Lama himself came to Lhasa and pleaded with the government that his monastery cannot pay such a huge tax. At that time, Drönyerchemmo Apso wielded much power and authority in the government. The Panchen Lama approached him with a gift of a small leather bag of gold coins and sought his help to get an exemption from the 'Bashi' tax. Apso made good use of this chance to take revenge on Tashilunpo. He went straight to the Dalai Lama and told him, 'It seems Tashilunpo can well afford to pay the 'Babshi' tax, because I, an old man pushing towards the end of his life, was offered these gold coins by them to buy my bread.'

I heard all these things, but personally I feel such things seem to have been done intentionally to create misunderstanding and disfavor towards Tashilunpo. So in any case, Tashilunpo was not given an exemption from the tax. The Panchen Lama thought that if he seeks the government's permission to leave, it will never be given so he secretly fled.

Q

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What did he do after escaping?

A

It was said that the 13th Dalai Lama told his attendants to bring him juniper leaves, tsamba and other things and performed the incense ritual, a common ritual of propitiation of deities to seek protection during a journey. So, the Dalai Lama offered prayer for a long time facing towards the east and it was said that tears rolled down while he prayed. It was said that on the very same day that the Panchen Lama had left from Tashilunpo, Tshökhog [tib. mtsho sgo] [a Tibetan government official] was sent by the government to bring the Panchen Lama back.

Q

Was Tshökhog able to catch the Panchen Lama?

A

He had nearly caught up with the Panchen Lama, but then when Panchen Lama reached a big river, he took a handful of water, prayed for awhile and threw the water back into the river and a path was created and he crossed the river and then prayed and the river merged back closed together. Thus Tshökhog was left on the other side of the river. This was the beginning of the Panchen issue. Later when the Panchen Lama returned from China, it appeared that he tried to show off his might to the government and said that he is going to bring the Chinese soldiers. The Tibetan government also acted tough and the talks between the two sides resulted in a long deadlock during which Panchen Lama died. It is tragic that the master and the disciple, [tib. rgyal ba yab sras] [Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama] could not meet each other in the end.

Q

Finally, the Panchen Lama died in Ragshi Lungshö Monastery. A certain group of people say that Panchen Lama died from depression [tib. sku rlung]?'

A

This might be true to some extent. What we learned from this Panchen episode is that it was the people functioning below the highest pontiffs who were the real creators of all the trouble. This is the theme of the Jungpo Thonyö Thondrub [tib. gcung po don yod don grub], a popular folktale.

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Q

Actually the Tibetan government, including Reting Rinpoche and Sendregasum, wanted the Panchen Lama to return, but the main hurdle was the Chinese soldiers who had come with him.

A

The Tashilunpo kudraks were under some pressure to act tough with the government because they feared being suppressed if they lost in the bargaining with the government. I heard from the Simpön Khenpo that the 13th Dalai Lama had made an artist draw the image of the Panchen Lamm on the table in which the Panchen Lama was folding his hands when he could not pass a rocky path, predicting the Panchen Lama would not come up [return]. He is really the one who sees all the three times; past, present and future [tib. dus gsum gsal gzigs]. The Simpön Khenpo told my teacher, if you want to, I can let you see this drawing, but my teacher told him, "Since the event is over, it would make me feel sad."

Q

This was the Fire Mouse year, 1936, and you had grown up quite well, right?

A

Yes, at the time of the Dalai Lama's enthronement, I was quite grown up.

Q

The Communist Chinese are reported to have come as far as some Kham areas in 1936 during their famous "Long March." Did this cause any serious fears or tensions in Lhasa? I heard that Kyabje Phabongkha also performed the fire exorcism against the Chinese.

A

Yes. It did. They had actually planned to come via Dartsedo but one of the Chengdu leaders who happened to be in Dartsedo at that time destroyed the bridge which the Communists had to cross. Since they could not enter Dartsedo, they went to Gyalrong and from Gyalrong to Tawu [tib. rta'u] and Trango [tib. brag 'go]. From Tawu they escaped with the Khazaks.

Q

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The news of the Chinese coming into Tibet caused much fear and tension, right?

A

Yes, all kinds of gossip about the Chinese were widespread throughout Lhasa.

Q

But they didn't know where they were going, right?

A

Yes. Some said these Chinese were very poor and that they had no weapons with them. Others said they were like beggars and ate the meat of all kinds of animals like horses.

Q

At about this time, five German nationals including Dr Ernst Schäfer arrived in Lhasa [1939] and the monks threw stones at them when they tried to take photographs during the Mönlam exorcism. Did you know about this?

A

Yes. Later, the shengo and the chagdampa [monk disciplinarians] went to see them and apologized to them for the misbehavior of the monks. This must have been done because of orders from the government.

Q

After the demise of the Panchen Lama, one group of his followers returned with his body and the other group went back to China. How did this happen?

A

Yes. One group returned back to China because they no longer had any power or popularity.

Q

Did they say that they were defecting to China?

A

Yes.

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Q

Who were the ones that returned to China?

A

I don't know.

Q

Did the government give appropriate reception for the body of the Panchen Lama when it was brought back to Tibet?

A

Yes, the government gave a good reception. The body was not brought to Lhasa but was taken straight to Tsang [where Tashilunpo monastery is situated] through Nagchukha.

Q

At about this time, Reting Rinpoche asked to resign and as a result of this, Silön Langdün had to relinquish his post and function as a nominal head. How did this happen?

A

According to the popular gossip of the time, it was said that Langdün was related to the Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama himself taught him how to write, so all the official matters that were forwarded for consultation with the Regent and the silön were handled and decided by the Silön Langdün without the consent of Regent Reting Rinpoche. Reting Rinpoche, who was the Regent, did not get a chance to assert his opinion and suggestions on such matters. So as a result of this internal difficulty between the two, Reting Rinpoche said that if such is the state of things, there is no need for me to be the Regent and that he should resign. Langdün understood the situation and offered to take a nominal position.

Q

How did Langdün know the reasons why Reting Rinpoche asked for his resignation?

A

They might have had internal talks between them?

Q

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I heard the talks first came from the monastic side.

A

I don't think this is true.

Q

I heard that Dromtö Chöndze [tib. 'brom stod], the Töpa Abbot of Sera, had said that if there are such hurdles for Reting Rinpoche to function as the Regent, they should be removed soon. And it was reportedly said that Reting Rinpoche himself described his sharing of power with Langdün implicitly, by using the Tibetan saying, "Two Buddhas for one Buddhism" [tib. bstan pa gcig la ston pa gnyis] Did you know about this?

A

Yes, I heard it was like one land having two kings [tib. lung pa gcig la rgyal po gnyis]. Probably, that proverb regarding the Buddhism was used by Dromtö Chöndze and they might have had internal talks. Then Reting's name was also changed. In the beginning, he was called the Sikyong [tib. srid skyong] and later he was called Gyaltsab [tib. rgyal tshab] after Langdün was demoted [actually both mean regent]. Also on the day when Langdün was demoted, strange evil omens occurred. A violent dust filled wind covered the sky and the abbots too were not in the monastery as they were at the time in the tsondu. Such strange things happened.

Q

Wasn't that on the day they expelled the scapegoat, Lugong [tib. glud sgong], after the Mönlam?

A

Probably, it was. I was at the Mönlam Prayer Assembly that was done without serving tea [tib. skam tshogs] and when the morning tea ceremony, drungja was held, I heard that Langdün had been demoted.

Q

After this, the tentative candidates for Dalai Lama's reincarnation were the one from Kumbum [tib. sku 'bum] [the present Dalai Lama], the Mindröling [tib. smon grol gling] Dungse and another one.

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A

The Kunbum candidate was the main or the real reincarnation. Actually it has been already confirmed internally that the Kumbum candidate was the real reincarnation.

Q

How did they come to the conclusion that the Kumbum candidate was the real reincarnation of the 13th?

A

It was revealed in the sacred lake.

Q

But in the 'Lake' they just saw the three letters, A, Ka, Ma. It was not very clear.

A

Even the house in which the present Dalai Lama was born conforms to the one revealed in the 'Lake.' But in the beginning, they had to say that he is a candidate otherwise there were lot of obstacles to bringing him to Tibet.

Q

It is said that from the very beginning when they were sent to go to Kumbum, Reting Rinpoche already knew that the Kumbum candidate is the actual reincarnation. How did he know it?

A

I wonder how? I also heard that the Dalai Lama told a lot of things to the Ketsang [tib. ke'u tshang] Rinpoche.

Q

Some say that Tsörujenpa, the deity of Phenpo Ganden Chönkhor, explained in detail the meaning of the three letters, A, Ka and Ma which Reting Rinpoche saw in the Sacred Lake. After this, Reting came to the conclusion that the Kunbum born incarnate was the real reincarnation of the 13th.

A

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I think the prophecies given by the Nechung and other deities differ from the ones which they give to the inner circle or the concerned individuals and the one which they announce to the general public. This is, I think, quite true. I also heard that when this Dalai Lama was to come to India, Nechung gave a prophecy saying that the Dalai Lama doesn't need to go, [tib. 'dre nga la ya nga med] but internally it was prophesied to go.

Q

I heard that Nechung prophesied, "I, the ghost will provide the ferry on the river" [tib. rab med pa'i chu bo la 'dre ngas gru shan rta 'go byed].

A

This must be later on.

Q

Do you remember about the reincarnation coming up [to Lhasa]?

A

We went to receive him at the field called Döguthang [tib. 'dod rgu thang].